

# House Schedule: Recent Practices and Proposed Options

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## House Schedule: Recent Practices and Proposed Options

House scheduling practices have been criticized frequently in recent years for bringing about compressed workweeks, protracted daily sessions, conflicts between floor and committee work, pressure on family life, and inefficient use of time generally. Especially in the context of reform efforts in the 103rd and 104th Congresses (1993-1996), several alternatives have drawn support and objection. These discussions indicate that current practices are strongly related to Members' weekend commutes to their home districts. Members generally arrange their schedules so as to devote to these trips as much as possible of the time when no recorded floor votes are expected.

These practices tend to result in a "Tuesday-to-Thursday" week, with three afternoons generally available for floor business and only two mornings for committee work. As a consequence, committee meetings extend into afternoons and floor sessions into the morning, creating scheduling conflicts for Members. Floor sessions also extend into the evenings, taking time from personal life for Members with families in the Washington area. To address these conditions, some Members have suggested that convening the House earlier in the day, making the floor schedule more predictable, and similar practices, could reduce the need for evening sessions, and thereby make it more feasible to continue to schedule extended weekends for travel to the district.

A different approach to these problems proposes to adopt a full five-day workweek. The first session of the 104th Congress attempted such a schedule. Even then, however, Members' travel schedules made it generally impracticable to conduct floor votes before the end of Monday afternoon or after the middle of Friday afternoon. Also, under the rigorous conditions of that session, even this schedule did not eliminate frequent resort to evening sessions.

A third alternative proposed has been to provide a week of recess after each third workweek of five full days. In a four-week period, this schedule would afford more working days, and more available mornings, than would continual three-day workweeks. The intent of this plan is that Members concentrate their trips home in the recesses, rather than between consecutive weeks in which the House meets. However, Senate experience with a similar plan suggests that Members are likely to continue commuting on short weekends even when longer recesses are also provided.

A fourth alternative, proposed as a middle course among the preceding, has been to establish a four-day workweek. This plan would afford more time for floor and committee sessions than currently, without making weekend commutes impracticable. In one version, the workweeks would be staggered so as to provide a four-day weekend every other week. Although this plan could still increase the time available for Washington work, it might yet fail to reduce Member commuting on the short weekends.

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## Commuting, Compression, and Committee Work

Many Members have in recent years expressed dissatisfaction with the way the House arranges its work schedule. The chief complaints appear to be that existing practices make inefficient use of time and do not allow predictability, generating persistent scheduling conflicts and other time pressures. These issues gained in prominence especially through the work of the 1993 Joint Committee on the Operations of Congress (“JCOC,” often known as the “Hamilton-Boren reform committee”), during 1994 hearings by the House Committee on Rules on the JCOC’s recommendations, and in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress (1995-1996) after the new Republican majority adopted reforms based in part on these deliberations.

This report discusses how four types of House schedule that have been practiced or proposed during the past decade address these areas of dissatisfaction. The four types of schedule are:

- the “Tuesday-to-Thursday” schedule;
- the five-day workweek;
- the “three weeks on, one week off” plan; and
- the four-day workweek.

These four scheduling arrangements are distinguished primarily by the length of the workweek. Each has different implications for (1) weekend and recess commuting, (2) compression of the legislative workweek, (3) the length of daily floor sessions, (4) the timing of committee meetings, and (5) conflicts among floor work, committee work, and personal life.

Observers agree that Members generally strive to return to their home districts whenever they can accomplish the round trip in the time available. At least those representing the most distant districts obtain very little actual time at home on a two-day weekend round trip. Most Members appear willing to extend their weekly trips home into the workweek as long as they do not miss recorded votes.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, *Background Materials: Supplemental Information Provided to Members of the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress*, S.Prt. 103-55, 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 1993), pp. 19, 1005; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Rules, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, hearing on H.R. 3801, vol. I., 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., Feb. 9, 1994 (Washington: GPO, 1994), p. 29; and Timothy P. Nokken and Brian R. Sala, “Institutional Evolution and the Rise of the (continued...) ”

workweek for scheduling purposes effectively comes to be defined, not by whether the House is in session, but by whether recorded votes will occur.

Because votes must be scheduled for times when most Members will be present, these patterns of weekend commuting tend to compress floor business into the midweek days. This compression, in turn, tends to require floor sessions to extend beyond the customary afternoon period into the evening or forenoon, or both. When floor sessions extend into the evenings, especially on an unscheduled basis, they tend to interfere with Members' family lives. This circumstance appears to be a chief source of the demand that scheduling be made more "family friendly."

When floor sessions extend into the forenoon, on the other hand, they tend to conflict with committee meetings. At the same time, low attendance on days without floor votes tends to require committees to meet chiefly on the midweek days as well. In addition, because the House normally meets in the afternoons, Members can take the morning of the first day of each week on which floor votes occur as travel time, and that morning becomes unavailable for committee work. For these reasons, committee meetings tend to extend into the afternoons. The overlapping of committee and floor work that results from all these considerations is a chief source of scheduling conflicts.

## Tuesday-to-Thursday Schedule

In recent years, the House has frequently tended to confine recorded votes to the middle three days of the week.<sup>2</sup> It does so either by meeting in pro forma session on Mondays and Fridays, or by "rolling" until the next business day any recorded votes that may be ordered on those days.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, on a Monday, the House may "roll" recorded votes only until after 5 p.m., when most Members using the day for travel will have arrived in Washington.

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

Tuesday-Thursday Club in the House of Representatives," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (Washington, Sept. 2000).

<sup>2</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, pp. 1088-1104; U.S. Congress, Committee on Rules, Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, hearings on H.R. 3801, vol. III, 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., March 6, 10, 16, 24, and April 13, 1994 (Washington: GPO, 1994), p. 157; Nokken and Sala, "Institutional Evolution and the Tuesday-Thursday Club"; Kenneth J. Cooper, "Family Friendly' Work Schedule Will Come Later," *Washington Post*, Dec. 16, 1994, p. A21; and Janet Hook, "House Republicans Rehearse Taking Reins of Power," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, vol. 52, Dec. 17, 1994, p. 3547.

<sup>3</sup>The House may stand in adjournment from Friday through Monday, inclusive, only by authority of a concurrent resolution, because "neither House ... shall, without the consent of the other, adjourn for more than three days ...." Constitution, Article I, sec. 5, in U.S. Congress, House, *Constitution, Jefferson's Manual, and Rules of the House of Representatives*, 106<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.Doc. 105-358, 105<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., compiled by Charles W. Johnson, Parliamentarian (Washington: GPO, 1999), sec. 82-84.

The core objection raised against schedules of this kind has been that they afford too little time for the legislative work of the House. Critics assert that when only three weekdays are available for floor business, “late nights and missed family dinners” become frequent, especially during busy legislative periods or when the House does not convene until noon.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, the House may find it necessary to convene in the forenoon, which tends to create conflicts with committee meetings.

At the same time, as one Member noted, this schedule permits committees to “meet only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, [and] most ... meet at Tuesday, 1 o’clock, Wednesday at maybe 9 o’clock in the morning, and Thursday at 9 o’clock.”<sup>5</sup> Given this limited range of options, committee meetings must frequently conflict with each other. Under this schedule, as well, committees often find it necessary to continue meeting into the afternoon, when their activity tends to conflict with floor sessions.

Together, these practices exacerbate scheduling conflicts for Members. Many have accordingly criticized these arrangements for fostering “fractured attention” and undermining the quality of deliberation, both in committee and on the floor.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, when few floor votes occur on Monday and Friday, many Members may lengthen their weekends further, arriving on Tuesday and departing on Thursday. Under these conditions, one Member has argued, a Tuesday-to-Thursday schedule does not afford even a true three-day workweek for legislative business, but instead “two half days and a full day on Wednesday.”<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, substantial groups of Members have recurrently supported this arrangement over other alternatives. In 1993, more than 100 Members endorsed its retention against the four-day workweek recommended by the JCOC,<sup>8</sup> and during the transition to the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1996, more than 65 Members signed a letter to the

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<sup>4</sup>Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, p. 199; and Alice A. Love, “Members, Families to Meet on Friendly Schedule,” *Roll Call*, Nov. 28, 1994, pp. 3, 23.

<sup>5</sup>Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, pp. 197-199; and U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, *Organization of the Congress: Final Report*, H.Rept. 103-413, vol. II [and] S.Rept. 103-215, vol. II, 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 1993), p. 211.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, *Business Meetings on Congressional Reform Legislation*, S.Hrg. 103-320, 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 1993), pp. 438, 675; U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, *Organization of the Congress: Final Report of the House Members*, H.Rept. 103-413, vol. I, 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (Washington: GPO, 1993), pp. 34, 52; Committee on Rules, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. I, pp. 112-114; U.S. Congress, Committee on Rules, Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, hearings on H.R. 3801, vol. II, 103<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., Feb. 14 and March 2, 1994 (Washington: GPO, 1994), pp. 3, 9-10; and *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 125, 159.

<sup>7</sup>Committee on Rules, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. I, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup>“Family Values” [editorial], *Roll Call*, Nov. 17, 1994, p. 4.

leadership favoring it over a proposed five-day workweek.<sup>9</sup> The Family Friendly Advisory Committee, an informal group appointed by the leadership during the transition to the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, also endorsed a Tuesday-to-Thursday schedule<sup>10</sup> and, after the “hundred days,” conducted a survey whose response strongly supported it.<sup>11</sup>

## Five-Day Workweek

During the deliberations of the JCOC, several Members recommended expanding the legislative workweek to five days.<sup>12</sup> The leadership of the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress pursued this schedule through May 1994,<sup>13</sup> and before the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress one leadership candidate strongly advocated instituting a similar plan.<sup>14</sup> Advocates of this approach have argued that it would aid in reducing (1) schedule conflicts among committee meetings, by expanding the number of mornings on which committees can meet;<sup>15</sup> (2) evening sessions, by permitting earlier daily adjournments;<sup>16</sup> and (3) conflicts between committee and floor sessions, by permitting the House to convene later.<sup>17</sup>

At least under the exceptional circumstances of the “hundred days” in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, however, these expectations were not fully realized. The agenda scheduled

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<sup>9</sup>Al Kamen, “Noes to the Grindstone,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 4, 1998, p. A27; and Jim VandeHei, “Livingston Criticized on Three Fronts,” *Roll Call*, Nov. 30, 1998, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup>Cooper, “‘Family Friendly’ Work Schedule Will Come Later,” p. A21; Hook, “House Republicans Rehearse Taking Reins of Power,” p. 3547; Major Garrett, “The House Is Not a Home; Lawmakers Hope New Efficiency Means More Family Time,” *Washington Times*, Dec. 16, 1994, p. A12; Alice A. Love, “A Family Room for New House,” *Roll Call*, Dec. 19, 1994, p. 16; Michael Crowley, “It Gets Easier Later, They Say,” *National Journal*, vol. 27, Jan. 28, 1995, p. 238; and Alice A. Love, “Five-Day Weeks Ahead in House,” *Roll Call*, April 24, 1995, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup>Alice A. Love, “In Search of ‘Family Friendly’ Schedule,” *Roll Call*, July 13, 1995, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, pp. 45, 177, 406, 408, 1005.

<sup>13</sup>Alice A. Love, “Five Days a Week for House to Apr. 14,” *Roll Call*, Dec. 15, 1994, pp. 1, 16; Garrett, “The House is not a Home,” p. A12; Hook, “House Republicans Rehearse Taking Reins of Power,” p. 3547; Crowley, “It Gets Easier,” p. 238; and Love, “Five-Day Weeks Ahead in House,” p. 22.

<sup>14</sup>“Rep. Bob Livingston’s Letter to Speaker Newt Gingrich,” *Roll Call*, Nov. 9, 1998, p. 22; and Kamen, “Noes to the Grindstone,” p. A27.

<sup>15</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup>Rep. Frank Wolf, “Improving the House Schedule,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 141, Feb. 22, 1995, p. 5426; and Phil Duncan, “Routines in the House and Family Values,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, vol. 53, Oct. 21, 1995, p. 3238.

<sup>17</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, pp. 45, 56, 78, 1178; JCOC, *Business Meetings*, p. 246; JCOC, *Final Report*, vol. II, p. 37; JCOC, *Final Report*, vol. I, p. 6; Committee on Rules, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. I, pp. 60, 438, 675; and Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, pp. 123-125, 138-139, 157, 163.

during that period often required the House to convene in the forenoon and continue in evening session even when floor business was conducted five days per week.<sup>18</sup>

The experience of the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress also highlighted the importance many Members place on preserving opportunities for extended weekend commuting. In February 1995, for example, the leadership announced its intention to start taking up business on the floor by 2 p.m. on Mondays. Some Members from the Far West protested that even a 5 p.m. arrival on Capitol Hill required them to leave their districts on the earliest flight of the morning. The leadership ultimately adopted a suggestion that recorded votes ordered on Mondays be stacked until 5 p.m.<sup>19</sup>

Responding to preferences of this kind, most of the plans for a five-day legislative workweek discussed by the JCOC had proposed to retain restrictions on recorded votes on the first and last business days of the week. The leadership in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress also attempted to avoid recorded votes before 5 p.m. on Mondays and after 3 p.m. on Fridays.<sup>20</sup> Under the plan offered before the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress, too, floor sessions were to begin at noon on Monday, and no recorded votes were to occur before 5 p.m. on that day or after noon on Friday.<sup>21</sup> The more a five-day schedule observes such restrictions, the less it differs from a Tuesday-to-Thursday schedule.

### **“Three Weeks On, One Week Off”**

A proposal that attracted substantial favorable interest during the deliberations of the JCOC involved instituting a regular week-long recess after each third week of floor sessions. This proposal became known as the “three on, one off” plan. Such a schedule, it was argued, would facilitate scheduling five full days of legislative business during each of the other three weeks.<sup>22</sup>

Under this plan, only two of every four weekends would be restricted to two days. The other two weekends would be absorbed into the recurring recesses, which would afford Members the opportunity for a nine-day trip to their districts once every four weeks.<sup>23</sup> As one Member argued, this schedule would permit especially those

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<sup>18</sup>Love, “In Search of ‘Family Friendly’ Schedule,” pp. 1, 26; and “... And Less Work,” [editorial], *Roll Call*, July 13, 1995, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup>“Line-Item Veto Act,” debate in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 141, Feb. 3, 1995, pp. 1187-1188, 1190; and Deborah Kalb and Jennifer Senior, “Family Life Suffers During First 100 Days,” *The Hill*, March 22, 1995, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup>“Line-Item Veto Act,” pp. 1187-1188, 1190; and Kalb and Senior, “Family Life Suffers During First 100 Days,” p. 14.

<sup>21</sup>“Rep. Livingston’s Letter to Speaker Gingrich,” p. 22; and Kamen, “Noes to the Grindstone,” p. A27.

<sup>22</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, pp. 223, 1031; and Alice A. Love, “‘Family Friendly’ Survey Hits Hill,” *Roll Call*, Nov. 17, 1994, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, pp. 237, 442, 1177; JCOC, *Business Meetings*, p. 247; JCOC, *Final Report*, vol. II, p. 37; Committee on Rules, *Legislative Reorganization Act of* (continued...)



from the West Coast to “spend less time sitting on planes.”<sup>24</sup> Such considerations suggest that Members from distant districts would tend to gain the most from this schedule, inasmuch as commuting on short weekends is least efficient for them.

Under a “three on, one off” arrangement, each four-week cycle would contain 15 business days, rather than 12 under a Tuesday-to-Thursday schedule.<sup>25</sup> This gain would presumably reduce the need for convening the House before noon and continuing in evening sessions, and some have suggested that it could foster earlier annual adjournments as well.<sup>26</sup> The plan would also reduce (from four in 12 to three in 15) the proportion of legislative working days falling on the first day after a break, thereby increasing (from eight to 12) the number of mornings in each four-week period on which it would be practicable to schedule committee meetings.<sup>27</sup>

Substantial majorities of House Members responding to the JCOC survey supported the “three on, one off” concept, and over 100 later signed a letter to the leadership in its support.<sup>28</sup> Another group of similar size, however, signed a petition in opposition to this schedule, and the Family Friendly Advisory Committee recommended against it.<sup>29</sup> The House contingent of the JCOC declined to endorse the plan, on the ground that it could work effectively only if the leadership ensured that recorded votes would occur on all five workdays.<sup>30</sup>

Objections raised against the “three on, one off” plan again reflect the strong preference of Members to continue commuting even on two-day weekends. Members of the Advisory Committee objected to the proposal specifically on the ground of the difficulty of such travel, especially to distant districts.<sup>31</sup> One Member contended that under this schedule, Members might feel compelled to bring their families to the

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<sup>23</sup>(...continued)

1994, vol. I, pp. 112, 118-119; Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, p. 199; and “Family Values” [editorial], p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Committee on Rules, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. I, p. 116.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, p. 1008; and Love, “‘Family Friendly’ Survey Hits Hill,” p. 42.

<sup>27</sup>Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, p. 197.

<sup>28</sup>JCOC, *Business Meetings*, p. 246; Committee on Rules, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. I, p. 113; Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, pp. 199-200; and JCOC, *Final Report*, vol. II, pp. 226, 259.

<sup>29</sup>Alice A. Love, “Keep Current Tuesday to Thursday Schedule but Gavel in Earlier, ‘Friendly’ Panel Agrees,” *Roll Call*, Dec. 1, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup>JCOC, *Final Report*, vol. II, pp. 37, 52.

<sup>31</sup>Love, “Keep Current Tuesday to Thursday Schedule,” p. 11.

Washington area, and might then “visit ... their districts only once a month,” which could “diminish ... our ability to remain in touch with the country.”<sup>32</sup>

A chief reason for House interest in a “three on, one off” schedule was that Senate leadership had instituted a similar arrangement in 1988.<sup>33</sup> During hearings of the JCOC, however, Senate leaders remarked that colleagues had continued to request that recorded votes not be scheduled on Mondays, and still strove to begin their weekend travel on Thursday night. By 1993, the Senate was continuing to schedule recesses of a week in each month, but had increasingly reverted to three-day weeks for legislative business, and especially for recorded votes.<sup>34</sup> One House Member concluded that the Senate’s “three on, one off” schedule “does not work, and arguably they spend less time here than they did in the old days, because what they have now is their one week off plus the Tuesday through Thursday club going the other three weeks.”<sup>35</sup>

## Four-Day Workweek

In its report, the House contingent of the JCOC declined to recommend a schedule involving business weeks of five days.<sup>36</sup> Instead, it concluded that a four-day workweek would be sufficient to reduce the need for evening sessions,<sup>37</sup> and to permit restoring a separation of times for committee and floor business.<sup>38</sup> Under this proposal, the existing schedule of recesses within the session would be maintained.

Legislative workweeks of four days would still afford Members weekends of three full days for commuting to their districts. (A variant proposed by one Member would yield similar weekends by alternating three- and five-day business weeks.<sup>39</sup>) Some Members nevertheless opposed the JCOC plan on the ground that four-day weeks would still make it “very difficult to travel to the district for the weekend.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>JCOC, *Business Meetings*, p. 249; and JCOC, *Background Materials*, p. 442.

<sup>33</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, pp. 1050-1051; and Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, pp. 196, 198.

<sup>34</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, pp. 1050-1051; and Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, p. 203.

<sup>35</sup>Committee on Rules, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. I, p. 60. See JCOC, *Business Meetings*, p. 249.

<sup>36</sup>Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, p. 203.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 170; JCOC, *Final Report*, vol. II, p. 37; JCOC, *Final Report*, vol. I, pp. 6, 36, 135; and Love, “‘Family Friendly’ Survey Hits Hill,” p. 42.

<sup>39</sup>JCOC, *Background Materials*, p. 43.

<sup>40</sup>Subcommittee on Rules of the House, *Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994*, vol. III, p. 164.

Responding to this objection, the Democratic Study Group task force later proposed an alternative form of four-day workweek. Under this variant, the four-day weeks would be staggered, “with alternating Mondays and Fridays off to provide for a four-day weekend every two weeks.”<sup>41</sup> Like the “three on, one off” plan, this variant would require two two-day weekends in every four-week period. It would use the days saved, however, not to provide a single more extended travel opportunity, but to preserve the remaining two four-day weekends.

To make the full four-day week available for legislative business, the task force proposed to require that the first floor session of each week open with a recorded vote on approving the Journal, and that the last one close with a recorded vote on the motion to adjourn.<sup>42</sup> By this means, one proponent contended, a four-day workweek would permit the House to “schedule committees for four days instead of a day and a half or two days,” as allowed by a Tuesday-to-Thursday schedule.<sup>43</sup>

These requirements would still not increase the practicability of committee meetings on the first morning of the business week. Accordingly, another proposal for a four-day week called for floor “votes on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, and [for reserving] Wednesday for a committee day.” The feasibility of this plan would depend on most Members remaining available in Washington during the “committee day” because a round trip home in a single day would not be feasible. The day of floor session lost on Wednesdays could conceivably be made up by convening the House in the forenoon on Monday for a full day of session, enforced with an initial roll call vote.

## Daily Schedules and Predictability

To the extent that any schedule preserves opportunities for weekend commuting, it must presumably also retain some compression of the legislative workweek. A compressed workweek, in turn, will entail longer daily floor sessions. Members favorable to preserving opportunities for weekend commuting have generally argued that the House can adequately perform its legislative work in a compressed workweek. Their proposals have focused on ways of managing the extended floor sessions, and the conflicts between floor and committee meetings, that compressed workweeks tend to foster.

During the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, when the leadership contemplated from the outset that evening floor sessions would be required even with five-day workweeks, several Members protested that these arrangements would “undermine ... attempts to give Members more time with their families.”<sup>44</sup> Some urged that floor action and family

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-171, 177-178.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-172, 176-177.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 194, 203.

<sup>44</sup>Eliza Newline Carey, “Clean Sweep?” *National Journal*, vol. 27, Jan. 21, 1995, pp. 156, 158.

life could be better balanced if the House both convened and adjourned earlier.<sup>45</sup> Proposals advanced during this period included (1) limiting late sessions to one night weekly<sup>46</sup>; (2) ensuring one adjournment by 6 p.m. each week, and compensating by convening as early as 8 a.m.<sup>47</sup>; and (3) balancing Wednesday and Thursday sessions more nearly equally, rather than using late Wednesdays to compensate for earlier Thursday adjournments.<sup>48</sup>

During this same period, the Family Friendly Advisory Committee took the view that if the House met at 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. on the three midweek days, and planned for late evening sessions on Wednesdays, it could normally adjourn on Tuesdays by 6 p.m. for family dinners and on Thursdays by 4 p.m. for trips home.<sup>49</sup> Another Member, less optimistically, argued that legislative business could successfully be conducted in three days per week if the House continued in session from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on those days.<sup>50</sup>

Neither of these proposals explicitly addressed how continual forenoon floor sessions might affect committee work. Some Members suggested that scheduling pressures in floor sessions could be eased, while still minimizing conflicts with committee work and personal life, by using the forenoon and evening portions of floor sessions as much as possible for non-legislative forms of action. For example, one-minute speeches could be postponed until the end of the day, entertained before 9 a.m., or omitted on days when adjournment was scheduled for later than 9 p.m. Another suggestion would save time for legislative business by suspending “morning hour” debates. A third proposal would “roll” until the next day all votes ordered after 8 p.m.<sup>51</sup>

Comments by many Members indicate that the frequent need for evening sessions is a principal source of the unpredictability to which they object. This

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<sup>45</sup>Rep. Wolf, “Improving the House Schedule,” p. 5426; Duncan, “Routines in the House and Family Values,” p. 3238; Love, “Five-Day Weeks Ahead in House,” p. 22; and Ed Henry, “The House is Now ‘Family-Friendly’ Says GOP, but Some Dems Disagree,” *Roll Call*, May 23, 1996, pp. 1, 25.

<sup>46</sup>Rep. Frank Wolf, “Family Quality of Life Advisory Committee – Assessment of Efforts in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress,” remarks in the House and material inserted, *Congressional Record*, vol. 142, Sept. 24, 1996, pp. 10770-10771.

<sup>47</sup>Rep. Tim Roemer, “Congress Should Be More Family Friendly,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 141, July 21, 1995, p. 19911; and Love, “Five-Day Weeks Ahead in House,” p. 22.

<sup>48</sup>Henry, “The House is Now ‘Family-Friendly,’” pp. 1, 25. See “Family-Unfriendly” [editorial], *Roll Call*, May 23, 1996, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>Rep. Wolf, “Improving the House Schedule,” p. 5426; Love, “Keep Current Tuesday to Thursday Schedule,” p. 11; and Love, “Five-Day Weeks Ahead in House,” p. 22.

<sup>50</sup>“Legislative Program,” debate in the House, *Congressional Record*, vol. 141, July 21, 1995, p. 19978.

<sup>51</sup>Rep. Wolf, “Family Quality of Life Advisory Committee,” pp. 10770-10771; Rep. Wolf, “Improving the House Schedule,” p. 5426; and “Legislative Program,” p. 19978.

unpredictability, as much as extended floor sessions themselves, is cited as one of the chief ways in which the House schedule fails to be “family friendly.”<sup>52</sup> Unpredictable requirements for extended sessions, in turn, presumably grow more intense as the compression of the workweek increases.

Improving predictability, however, faces an additional difficulty that has been little remarked in this context. The leadership cannot easily regulate, or even predict, the hundreds of decisions by individual Members on which the flow of legislative action depends. It can announce a schedule, but ultimately lacks much capacity to ensure its realization. Even rules designed to enforce a schedule would have to be modified continually to respond to the flow of daily legislative events. Only by organizing the House more on hierarchical and managerial principles, rather than collective and deliberative ones, might the leadership obtain means for fulfilling Members’ demands for predictability.

## Comparison and Conclusion

In contemporary circumstances, any scheduling arrangement seems unlikely to win acceptance unless it either accommodates, or brings about alterations in, certain established patterns of behavior, specifically that Members generally:

- strive to travel to their districts during any break of at least two days in the legislative schedule;
- strive to extend the duration of any trip home as much as possible;
- regard floor sessions as insufficient reason to remain in Washington unless recorded votes are in prospect; and
- regard committee meetings alone as insufficient reason to remain in Washington.

The central objective of each proposed change discussed above is to permit spreading floor and committee work over a greater number of days, so as to reduce schedule conflicts and extended sessions. The chief objection to each concerns the difficulties that a more extended workweek creates for weekend commuting. Both the “three on, one off” plan and the staggered four-day week are explicitly designed to meet these objections by finding more efficient combinations of legislative time with commuting time. The following table accordingly summarizes the four alternatives discussed here by comparing the time each makes available for floor, committee, and district work.

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<sup>52</sup>JCOC, *Final Report*, vol. II, p. 34; Love, “Members, Families to Meet on Friendly Schedule,” pp. 3, 23; Love, “Five Days a Week for House to Apr. 14,” p. 16; Love, “Five-Day Weeks Ahead in House,” p. 22; Crowley, “It Gets Easier Later,” p. 238; “Legislative Program,” p. 19978; Rep. Roemer, “Congress Should be More Family Friendly,” p. 19911; Henry, “The House is Now ‘Family-Friendly,’” pp. 1, 25; “Family-Unfriendly” [editorial], p. 4; Alice A. Love, “A Family Room for New House,” *Roll Call*, Dec. 19, 1994, p. 16; Louis Jacobson, “Working Hard and Not So Hard,” *National Journal*, Jan. 14, 1995, p. 118; and Betsy Rothstein, “Family-Friendly Congress Remains an Elusive Goal,” *The Hill*, March 24, 1999, pp. 1, 20.

**Legislative Work Days and District Travel Opportunities  
Available  
in Each Four-Week Period Under Selected Scheduling  
Arrangements**

Scheduling Arrangement	Legislative work days <sup>A</sup>			District travel opportunities <sup>B</sup>		
	Total	Committees (Mornings)	Evenings	Two-day	Four-day	Nine-day
Tuesday-to-Thursday	12	8	8		4	
Five-day weeks	20	16	16	4		
“Three on, one off”	15	12	12	2		1
Staggered four-day weeks	16	12	12	2	2	

<sup>A</sup> Figures for “Committees” and “Evenings” assume that no recorded votes would occur before late afternoon on the first legislative work day of each week or after mid-afternoon on the last.

<sup>B</sup> Figures are for full days only. In addition to these, under the assumptions stated in the previous note, the morning of the first legislative work day in each week, and the evening of the last, would be regarded as available for travel time.

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